ChatGPT
A New Source for Lead Generation?

Not so Fast! Google Still Rules the World Wide Web

by Welton Hong

If someone poses questions to ChatGPT® about funeral planning, and your website answers questions about cremation, navigating grief, and related subjects, your site may be referenced as a source—and when that happens, people click.

But I recently heard a story from a business owner that stopped me cold: They told me they won a client referral through ChatGPT®.

In other words, after earning the client's business, they asked them how they heard about them—and the answer was from ChatGPT®.

And that got me thinking … is ChatGPT® being used like a search engine—one that will soon compete head-to-head with the likes of Google® and Bing®?

What better place to start researching this question than ChatGPT® itself, which told me the following: *Yes, many people are increasingly using ChatGPT® like a search engine.*

ChatGPT® said this is especially true for:
- **Quick answers** to factual questions (*e.g.*, definitions, summaries, how-to guides).
- **Personalized recommendations** (*e.g.*, "Which funeral home near me is best?").
- **Summarized research** from multiple sources, especially when looking for comparisons or decision support.
- **Contextual follow-up:** Unlike Google®, ChatGPT® can carry a conversation and build on previous questions.
- **Simplification of complex info**, such as legal or medical topics, in more understandable language.

However, there are some key differences:
- **Search engines** return a list of links to webpages. You have to sift through them.
- **ChatGPT®** gives direct answers, often distilled from various sources or its own training data.

That said, when people need up-to-date, location-specific, or official info (like news, weather, election details, or business hours), ChatGPT® notes that it often pulls information from the web—just like a search engine does—using integrated browsing tools.

Context

First, it's worth noting that ChatGPT® has some limitations and pitfalls, including that it can sound authoritative even when it's wrong or outdated; it doesn't have access to breaking news; and constantly deferring to AI can atrophy a person's ability to analyze, question, or think independently.

The public is increasingly looking to it as a resource, and business owners don't get ahead by ignoring consumer behavior.

So, are more people using ChatGPT® like a search engine? The answer to that is yes, but the caveat is that Google® remains king of the search universe.

In fact, according to a March 2025 article in *Search Engine Land*,[1] Google® was 373 times used more often than ChatGPT® search, as per an analysis by SparkToro® co-founder Rand Fishkin. Of course, you could ask ChatGPT® to find the report for you—I tried, and it did.

The article stated, "Many search marketers, users, and analysts have speculated that AI tools are reducing Google's® dominance in search. However, this research finds no evidence that vast numbers

of searchers are abandoning Google® for ChatGPT® and other AI search engines and chatbot experiences."

The analysis by SparkToro® is quite fascinating. Key findings from the SparkToro® report include:

- **Google's® search growth:** Google® experienced a significant 21.64% increase in search volume in 2024 compared to the previous year. This growth is notable for a mature platform and is attributed, in part, to the introduction of AI Overviews®, which enhanced user engagement and satisfaction.
- **Search volume comparison:** In 2024, Google® handled approximately 14 billion searches per day, totaling over 5 trillion searches for the year. In contrast, ChatGPT® managed about 37.5 million search-like queries daily, amounting to roughly 365 billion annual searches. This means Google® processed about 373 times more searches than ChatGPT® during the same period.
- **Market share insights:** Despite the rise of AI tools, Google's® dominance in the search market remained strong, with a global market share of approximately 93.6% in 2024. Even when considering other AI tools like Perplexity®, Claude®, Copilot®, and Gemini®, the combined share of AI-driven search activity was under 2% of global search volume.

Limitations

As an experiment, I asked ChatGPT® about funeral homes in my area, including variations of "What is the best funeral home near me?"

Interestingly, ChatGPT® would not give me a definitive answer— at least for my coverage area, it did not recommend one business above all others.

Rather, much like the featured listings from a Google® search, it listed several options of funeral homes near me, along with three clickable buttons for each business: *directions, website* and *call.* ChatGPT® also provided a Google® map designating where each funeral home was located in relation to my workstation where I entered the query.

What struck me, of course, is what I did *not* see on the ChatGPT® results, which was namely the paid-for sponsored listings Google® provides when typing in a query such as "funeral home near me" as well as the one paid-for listing at the very top of Google's Local Four Pack® (which used to be a Three Pack before it added a sponsored option at the top).

Another data point that struck me is that no matter how I worded my question, I could not get ChatGPT® to divulge hard information or statistics related to funeral home reviews. Granted, it gave me a list of highly regarded funeral homes near me, but it failed to provide granular information related to the number of stars a funeral home received or any detailed information related to rankings on Google®, Yelp® or Facebook®, which was somewhat surprising.

Some takeaways from all this include:

- **Google® should remain your focus:** When it comes to online search, Google® is still at the top and will likely remain so for a long time. As a result, you must invest time and resources in making sure families seeking information about funeral planning on Google® find your business instead of your competitors.
- **Reviews remain essential:** It's harder than I expected to get straightforward information about funeral home rankings and
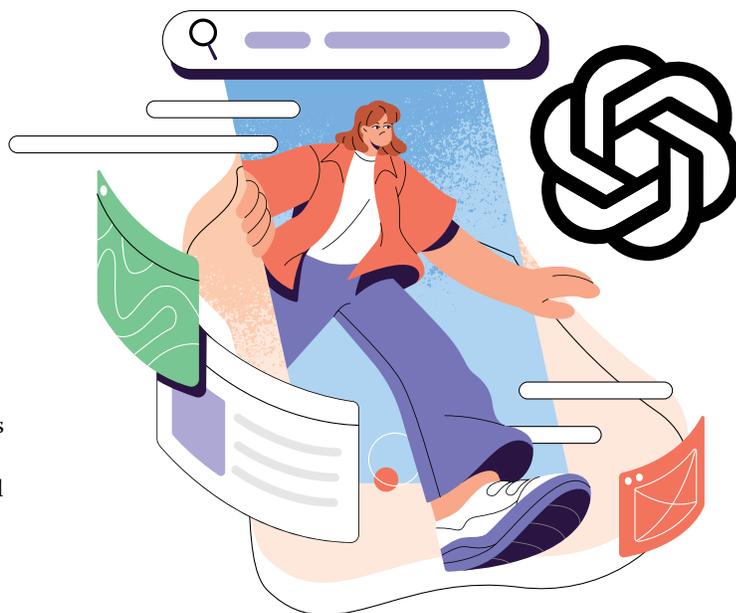
> It's harder than I expected to get straightforward information about funeral home rankings and reviews via ChatGPT® without jumping to another platform.

reviews via ChatGPT® without jumping to another platform. Keep in mind that even if ChatGPT® provides this information in the future, it's no doubt going to be pulling from popular review sites, including Google®, Yelp® and Facebook®.

Getting Ranked on ChatGPT®

So, what exactly does your funeral home need to do to get ranked highly on ChatGPT® when families do, in fact, consult it as if it were a search engine?

I asked ChatGPT® this very question, and it told me the following:

- **Optimize your Google® Business Profile:** ChatGPT® often references data pulled from Google reviews, maps, and local directories. Make your Google® Business Profile impeccable by completing all fields, regularly responding to reviews and encouraging families to leave reviews.
- **Get listed in reputable funeral directories:** These include Funeralwise.com®, Parting.com®, Legacy.com®, Yelp® (which influences some AI outputs) and the Better Business Bureau.
- **Boost review volume and quality:** ChatGPT® tends to mention businesses with a high number of positive reviews. So, try to get positive reviews!
- **Create structured content on your website:** AI prefers pulling from clearly structured, factual content. ChatGPT® recommends pricing transparency and maintaining FAQ sections.
- **Publish localized blog content:** Entries could address questions such as: *What do I do when someone dies in [your state]?; Best funeral options in [your city]; and Affordable cremation in [region].*
- **Ensure your name, address and phone number are consistent:** This includes on your website, on social profiles and in

third-party directories. Inconsistencies confuse both Google® and AI models and can reduce your trust signals.

- **Earn local backlinks:** By building relationships with churches, hospice centers, senior organizations and local news outlets, you'll be on your way to achieving this objective. High-quality backlinks position you as a trusted source—recognized by AI and search engines alike.
- **Engage on social media:** Active, well-managed Facebook® pages for funeral homes are often indexed and help ChatGPT® pick up signals about your brand legitimacy.
- **Be associated with "best of" or awards lists:** ChatGPT® notes that "even if paid, these lists often inform AI responses." So, get featured in local publications, neighborhood guides and in online comparison sites.
- **Consider creating a page specifically tailored for an AI query:** ChatGPT suggests creating a page titled something like ""Why Families Choose [Your Funeral Home]—Best Funeral Home in [City]." It notes that AI tools often pull content directly from such pages for direct questions.

Prepare for the Future

At first, it may seem somewhat concerning that ChatGPT® is increasingly being used as a search engine by families, but even Waldenbooks®, Borders®, and Barnes & Noble® sneered at the thought of Amazon® being serious competition.

However, all the recommendations that ChatGPT® gives to be mentioned when families use it as a search engine are also best practices to employ when seeking to rank highly on Google®.

So, while I'd never recommend shrugging off the importance of ChatGPT®, the good news here is that if you've been making Google® a priority, there is not too much you have to change to remain top of mind for ChatGPT® users.

If, however, you've been solely relying on Google's® sponsored or paid listings and discounting the need to rank high on organic search listings, then you may have some work to rank highly on ChatGPT®. M

Welton Hong is the founder & CEO of Ring Ring Marketing and a leading expert in creating case generation from online to the phone line. He is the author of "Making Your Phone Ring with Internet Marketing for Funeral Homes." For more information, visit www.FuneralHomeProfits.com.

Endnote

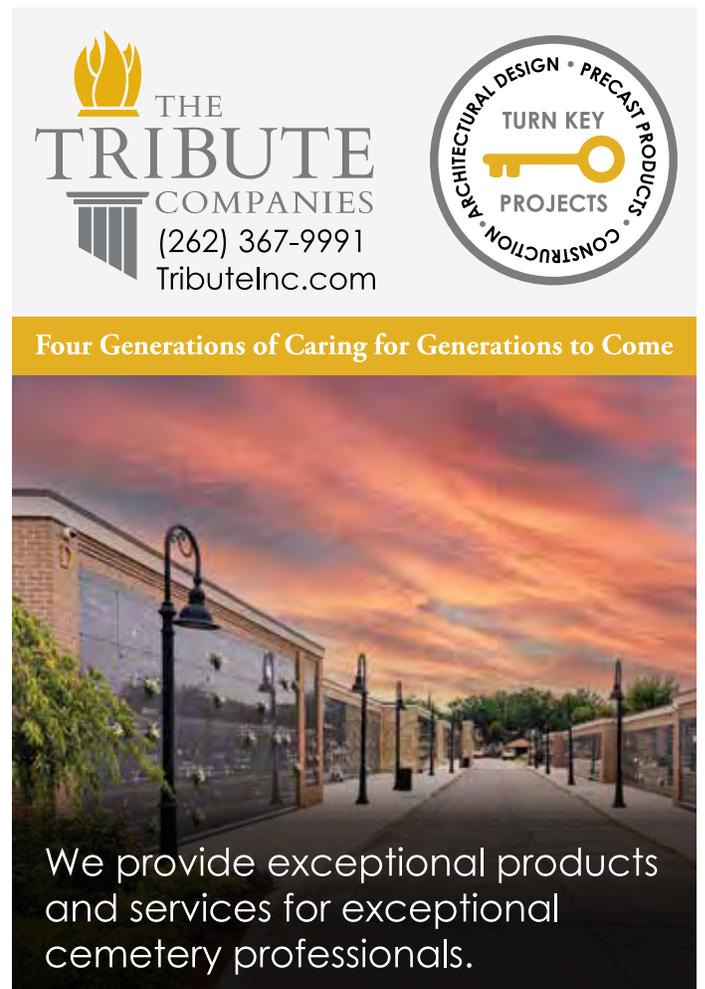1. "New Research: Google Search Grew 20%+ in 2024; receives ~373X more searches than ChatGPT"